

Special Points of Interest

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July, 2006



Parole Educates Inmates About Reentry

A group of inmates dressed in prison-issue jeans and white t-shirts trickled into the visiting room at North Central Correctional Institution in Gardner and sat in plastic chairs, waiting patiently to hear a presentation from a parole officer on the services available to inmates upon release from prison.

Most would complete their sentences within six months, when they would be considered wrap-ups—offenders released without parole supervision. Several would

be homeless and would need employment, ID, and healthcare.

Mike Bird, reentry supervisor

the inmates they were in for a tough adjustment.

“We know the barriers you are going to face,” he

said. “For the past 15 years, one out of two of you has been coming back” to prison after committing new crimes, he said. Parole and the Department of Correction [DOC] are looking to reduce that statistic by encouraging inmates to avail themselves of counseling and assistance offered through



Mike Bird, Reentry Supervisor at the Region 4 Parole Office in Worcester speaks about the parole board's Regional Reentry Center Initiative before a group of inmates at the North Central Correctional Institution in Gardner.

sor at the Region 4 Parole Office in Worcester, told

the agency's

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Probation and Parole Officials Attend Joint Training for Interstate Compact

This month, probation and parole joined in a two-day training session aimed at familiarizing Massachusetts officials with the rules and procedures of the new interstate compact for adult offender supervision.

In November, 2005, Governor W. Mitt Romney signed legislation authorizing the state's entry into a national compact that took effect in 2002, replacing a 1987 com-

pact. Massachusetts was the last state in the nation to join the new compact.

The compact regulates the interstate movement of offenders on parole and probation and is touted by supporters for offering a uniform, enforceable means of cooperation among law enforcement officials. The compact assists with tracking offenders who relocate to another state for personal,

financial, or treatment-related reasons. Requests to relocate must be approved by state law enforcement officials.

The legislation entering Massachusetts into the new compact also authorized the parole board to oversee its administration. An Advisory Council with the statutory authority to ensure adherence to the compact is in formation. Parole Board Chairman
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Chairman's Column

By Parole Board Chairman Maureen Walsh

Massachusetts Parole Officers are truly agents of change who have a complex and complicated job.

*-Parole Board
Chairman
Maureen Walsh*



This year, July 16 through the 22 has been nationally recognized as "Parole, Probation, & Community Supervision Week." This is an opportunity for others to recognize the critical role that we have in the criminal justice system and in improving public safety. It is also an opportunity to appreciate the contributions that staff have made during the year in supervising offenders to make our communities a safer place to live.

Massachusetts Parole Officers are truly agents of change who have a complex and complicated job. On each and every day, parole officers are required to wear many hats. They must prevent offenders from engaging in criminal activity and respond when necessary. They must assist offenders as they return to the community and obtain stability, and foremost they must protect the community at large. Parole officers are reducing recidivism on a daily basis by supervising, advising, counseling, and holding offenders accountable in the community.

There is not much recognition for the good work that is being done. When a parole officer manages an offender well in the community, whether it be by returning an offender to custody or helping him or her into treatment, it does not become a newsworthy event. This week gives us the opportunity to let you know we are proud of the dedication and professionalism of the Massachusetts Parole Board. Your contribution to public safety is appreciated!

President Bush Signs National Sex Offender Database into Law

President George W. Bush this month signed legislation authorizing the creation of a national sex offender database.

The Adam Walsh Child Protection and Safety Act of 2006 establishes a national Internet database listing the home and work addresses for convicted sex offenders. Users will be able to search the database by zip code.

Sex offenders must register for the database in person and will face a penalty of ten years incarceration for failing to update their information. The most serious offenders will remain in the database for life.

The law will also standardize publicly accessible information on state sex offender registries. The new national registry will include more detailed information, such as fingerprints, which will only be available to law enforcement and certain organizations that work with children.

The bill also establishes education grants and provides for 200 new federal prosecutors and 45 new computer forensic scientists to investigate sex crimes against children.

Interview with Parole Board Chairman Maureen Walsh

Maureen Walsh was appointed by Governor Mitt Romney in 2003 to serve as the Chairman of the Massachusetts Parole Board. Prior to her appointment, she was one of seven board members in the Commonwealth responsible for conducting hearings and rendering release decisions for parole eligible inmates. She is a graduate of the University of Massachusetts in Amherst and a cum laude graduate of Western New England School of Law, where she was Note Editor for the Law Review. Upon graduation, Ms. Walsh was selected to become a judicial law clerk in federal court for the Honorable Michael A. Ponsor at the United States District Court for the District of Massachusetts. She then became an Assistant District Attorney for the Northwestern District Attorney's Office, where she prosecuted numerous cases in the trial court. She was recently elected to serve as the President of the Hampshire County Bar Association and has volunteered with the Big Brothers/Big Sisters organization as well as various other charities in Hampshire County.

This past year, Ms. Walsh was the recipient of the "Women in Criminal Justice" Executive Committee Award for her distinguished work in the Massachusetts criminal justice system. She also received the Massachusetts Bar Association's Community Service Award for her charitable work in the community.

Why did you decide to apply for membership on the board?

In 1998, I was working as an Assistant District Attorney for the Northwestern District Attorney's Office and enjoying my job as a trial court prosecutor. At the time that I learned of the vacancy on the Parole Board, I was unaware and unfamiliar with the work of the agency. I began to learn as much as I could about being a Parole Board member, as well as about the agency itself. This was not an easy task, as there was not much public information about the Parole Board available. I spoke to existing Parole Board members and listened to what they had to say about the job. Almost each one of them described it as one of the best jobs and one of the most difficult jobs that they ever had.

At the District Attorney's Office, the challenge was always in proving the case beyond a reasonable doubt. I had experience working with victims, advocates, court officials, and members of law enforcement, however, as a prosecutor you do not interact with the defendant. What was so different and interesting about being on the Parole Board is that it focused not so much on what an offender did, but why they did it.

Analyzing and assessing the mindset of the offender, learning what particular set of conditions and supportive services could make a difference, and weighing and considering all of the relevant factors and rendering decisions were some of the reasons the job interested me.

What do you find most satisfying or enjoyable about being on the board?

As Chairman, I find it extremely rewarding to see the good work of the agency staff, both in the institutions and in the field, being given the recognition it deserves. The Parole Board has become a vital part of the criminal justice continuum and others are beginning to notice the good work that the agency does. The job is extremely challenging, yet rewarding on so many different fronts, whether in the case preparation phase, the decision-making phase, or the supervision phase. And, there is always a new emerging area that we are learning about on a wide range of topics such as sex offender management or effective substance abuse intervention. This is a job that is always challenging!

What do you think the most challenging aspect of the job is?

The most challenging part of the job is educating the public that public safety is better served by having offenders under parole supervision rather than having their parole denied and not being supervised. On a daily basis, Massachusetts Parole Board members make difficult decisions that have a great impact on public safety. A great deal of work goes into these decisions and their number one priority is keeping the community safe.

How do you think your prior experience has informed your work on the board?

I have had the opportunity to work as a police officer, intern at a district attorney's office as a victim witness advocate, a clerk for a federal district court judge, and to prosecute cases as an assistant district attorney. I think this past has allowed me to view different parts of the criminal justice continuum and have a greater appreciation and respect for each one of the roles. Yet I was not aware of the Parole Board and its role in any of those positions. I believe I would have been a better advocate, prosecutor, and clerk had I known more information about the post-incarceration system in Massachusetts. Out of all these experiences, listening and responding to victims of crime has had a definite impact on my career. And after becoming a parole board member, these skills helped in listening and responding to the offenders eligible for parole. Being a good parole board member, however, takes time, patience, and experience.

SNAPSHOT: FOUNDATION HOUSE RESIDENT CHARLES VEREEEN

By Nelson Simao



PHOTOGRAPH BY NELSON SIMAO

Charles Vereen is a resident of Foundation House in Springfield, a housing program operated by the Hampden County Sheriff's Department and contracted by the Massachusetts Parole Board to reserve beds for 15 parolees periods of up to four months.

Nelson Simao, Grant Manager for the Massachusetts Parole Board, operates a housing program that provides up to 70 beds at a time for parolees and offenders recently released from prison. The program contracts seven agencies throughout the state to provide housing and support services, such as counseling and job skills training.

On a hot, muggy afternoon, Charles Vereen returned to The Foundation House, a sober house in Springfield operated by the Hampden County Sheriff's Department, after working a morning shift at the Springfield Housing Authority. Charles is on parole until October for drug charges stemming from his long-time heroin addiction.

Upon entering Foundation House, one thing that immediately strikes you is the age discrepancy between Charles, who recently turned 50, and the younger residents who are on parole or have wrapped up their sentences. Charles has

experienced many social and cultural challenges since he began using marijuana at age 12 and heroin at age 14. Back then, he said, heroin was the drug of the affluent, not the poor of the inner city.

Charles looks back to his basketball playing days in high school and wonders what may have been if he didn't use drugs. He thinks he may have been good enough to play basketball in college; instead he has been in and out of jail since he was 19. He has been in the Ludlow jail for the past two and a half years, where he mentored some of his fellow inmates.

Although he enjoyed helping them, Charles is very critical of what he sees going on today among the prison population. "Most of the people around me weren't interested in becoming educated or improving their lives. You need to do stuff to improve yourself, not just go to the weight room to look big." Charles also states, "everybody has a burning desire to do something positive, but unless you feed the fires, you wind up dealing, using drugs, and back in the cell."

He attributes the apathetic attitudes common among young prisoners in large part to the negative influence of gangster music and culture. It was seeing these young prisoners that marked a turning point in Charles's life. "I realized sitting in the Ludlow jail surrounded by so much ignorance that I am better than this," he said.

Today, Charles is still mentoring, not in jail, but at Foundation House. He wants to be good role model for some of the younger men, even if he has to be stern to deliver his message. After getting his picture taken for this story, another resident quipped, "You look like a gangster," to which Charles responded, "No I don't ever want to look like that."

PAROLE STAFF ATTEND NATIONAL CONFERENCE IN CHICAGO

The 31st American Probation and Parole Association [APPA] training institute took place at the Hilton Chicago Hotel on July 23-26, drawing an estimated 1,600 parole, probation, and treatment professionals from around the country, including staff from the Massachusetts Parole Board. The training institute is a series of workshops and information sessions offered every July, following APPA's annual Community Supervision Week. The association also holds a winter institute in February.

1974, APPA considers itself the collective voice for probation and parole professionals in the United States. Canada joined the association in 1977.

By 1994, APPA had received \$5 million in grants to conduct research, develop standards, and provide training in areas such as drug testing, victim restitution, and intensive supervision. The Kentucky-based association is working on research projects related to sex offenders, elder abuse, rural communities, and domestic violence.

APPA began celebrating Community Supervision Week in 2000, on the 25th anniversary of the association's founding. The week's events are organized by individual probation and parole departments throughout the country and vary from state to state, according to Carl Wicklund, the association's executive director. Some parole and probation departments print APPA inspired bumper stickers, posters, and press releases, and distribute them in an effort to raise community awareness.

Forty-two percent of APPA's conference-goers work in adult probation or parole exclusively, with four percent in working in parole and 38 percent working in probation, according to the APPA website. The remainder work jointly in parole and probation, juvenile probation, or in treatment.

APPS's winter, 2007 institute will take place February 11-14.

More information is available at APPA-net.org or by calling 859-244-8196.

Parole Supervisor Sells Reentry Initiative at prisons (continued from pg. 1)

...Regional Reentry Center [RRC] Initiative. "I can tell from the looks on your faces that some of you think you can do it on your own. You can, but if you do, your chances are greater of going back to the can," Mr. Bird cautioned.

The Parole Board's RRC initiative is helping to pave the way for a Massachusetts law proposed by Lieutenant Governor Kerry Healey, requiring that all offenders leaving Massachusetts prisons be supervised for a minimum of nine months.

It's up to inmates to choose whether or not they want to go to one of the state's eight RRC's which offer help getting ID's, opening bank accounts, and accessing healthcare, among other services. The RRC's opened in October, 2004, and as of June, 2006, 1,263 offenders have visited a center upon leaving prison. Fifty-five percent have requested further assistance from RRC officers.

However, some staff at the Department of Correction believe inmates may eschew the RRC's out of skepticism and distrust, especially when information about the centers comes from correctional staff.

In an effort to educate the inmates, Raymond Marchili, deputy superintendent at Gardner, asked Mr. Bird to speak directly to inmates about the RRC's. "It's important for inmates to get information right from the source," said Mr. Marchili. "Parole can do a better job selling itself than DOC can," he said.

Moving slowly up and down the row of prisoners, Mr. Bird explained that the RRC's are a collaborative effort between DOC and the parole board, aimed at helping offenders make the transition from prison back into the community. "We have an idea of what to do to make sure you don't come back," he said, and one of the biggest causes of re-offense is not having a job. "No one is good with idle time," said Mr. Bird.

Reentry officers help ex-offenders find work by entering their names into a job search database and taking them to local career centers. "There are people at the career centers who work only with ex-offenders. They know what to expect. They know you have gaps in your resume and they know how to work with that," said Mr. Bird.

The inmates were full of questions about the reentry process and the RRC's, asking about hours of operation, transportation, and if they are required to go.

As Mr. Bird wrapped up his presentation, Mr. Marchili stressed the importance of the RRC's as a future resource to keep in mind. "You can't afford not to see this guy," said Mr. Marchili. "If you need help, it's there. Do yourself a favor. Do your family a favor."





John Walsh, host of the *America's Most Wanted* television show (center) was working with the Boston Police Department this winter to profile fugitive apprehension efforts and unsolved cases. Parole Officer Charlie Marcelonis (second row, far right) attended an event honoring Mr. Walsh with officials from the Boston Police Department.

A sex offender law named for Adam Walsh, Mr. Walsh's 6-year-old son, was signed this month by President Bush. Adam was abducted and killed 25 years ago.

The law establishes a national Internet database listing the names and addresses of convicted sex offenders.

Interstate Compact Training for Parole and Probation

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...Maureen Walsh has been named Commissioner of the Compact for the Commonwealth.

The council, once established, will benefit of both probation and parole. Don Blackburn, the executive director of the Interstate Commission for Adult Offender Supervision, suggested that that "it is imperative that the state [advisory] council function well," especially in states with separate parole and probation departments. "The [council] should have the authority to enforce the compact," he said. Twenty states, in addition to Massachusetts, have separate departments for probation and parole, said Mr. Blackburn. The remaining states have consolidated both functions into one department.

The state council will likely be formed sometime this fall, said Chairman Walsh. "We have identified different groups and representatives we believe should be on the council and are working toward its implementation," she said.

The old compact, known as the Interstate Compact for the Supervision of Parolees and Probationers, governed the transfer of parolees and probationers until 2001, when the Interstate Compact for Adult Offender Supervision was enacted. The new compact went into effect in 2002.

In addition to probation and parole officials, judges will need an education on compact rules and procedures. One of the common complaints heard from judges is the lengthy application process for interstate transfer, which can take six months to a year.

Should a judge fail to comply with the compact, the national commission can by a 2/3 vote elect to levy fines on the state or file an injunction in court demanding compliance. Tennessee was required to pay \$50,000 in legal fees for failing to obey the rules of the compact.

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